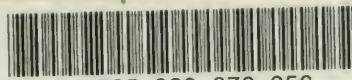


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THE BATTLE OF GROVETON;
OR,
SECOND BULL RUN.

A PAPER
READ BEFORE THE

COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN
MILITARY ORDER OF THE
LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES

BY
COMPANION GEO. C. HOPPER,
Late Major 1st Regiment Michigan Volunteer Infantry,

AT
DETROIT, MICH., JANUARY 5, 1893.

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The Battle of Groveton; or, Second Bull Run.

Commander and Companions:

I do not expect, in the short paper which I shall present to you to-night, to add anything to your stock of information regarding the general features of the Battle of Groveton, usually known as Second Bull Run or Manassas; but, as the conduct of brave men in extremity is wont to arouse the sympathy of other brave men who have been in like peril, perhaps some of the incidents which I shall relate will interest you.

In the reports sent from battle fields in the early days of the war a great deal of exaggeration was contained; and if a regiment suffered greatly, it was usually accounted for by the author of the report beholding (in his imagination at least) a large array of batteries, masked batteries and Black Horse Cavalry. I must confess that some such exaggeration has crept into the history of the 1st Michigan Infantry at Groveton, and I hope to show that a brave regiment may suffer great loss in a twenty minutes' charge, even though it does not have four or five batteries playing upon it all the time.

At sundown, August 28th, 1862, the 1st Michigan Infantry, which then formed part of the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 5th Corps of the Army of the Potomac, received orders to bivouac for the night at Bristow Station.

Five days previous it had landed at Acquia Creek, and since then had been making short rapid marches, with long halts between: as was supposed, in pursuit of a foe who could not be found. The next morning, August 29th, it took its line of march along the Orange and Alexandria R. R., toward Manassas Junction, where it arrived about ten A. M.; and while halted there, some troops came up who said they belonged to Gen. King's Division; that they were in an engagement the day before, and that, if we were looking for someone to fight, we would probably be accommodated before the day was done. This was the first authentic information we, I mean the line officers, had of the enemy being near us. I suppose the generals were better informed.

Soon resuming our march, we came to a road running at right angles to the railroad, filed to the left, and followed it a mile or more, when we came to a low hill which overlooked the country out towards Thoroughfare Gap. We then filed to the right, moved along the top of the hill until our brigade was all in line, halted, stacked arms, and rested.

The 13th New York was deployed as skirmishers, and soon the rattle of their muskets told us that there was at least a skirmish line of the enemy opposed to them. Whether it had a large support behind it, is a question not yet settled to the satisfaction of all the students of the military history of those times.

Our line of battle was on, what I take to be, the western slope of the hill top, and a nearly unobstructed view was had of the country before us straight out to Thoroughfare Gap.

We had not been in this position long before a large force of the enemy appeared, coming directly towards us, and when they were a mile away they apparently found a road leading to their left, which they took, thus bringing their line of march directly parallel to us.

Three shots were fired from one of our batteries, the shells exploding directly in their midst, and making a great commotion in their ranks. A few moments afterward they returned the fire; one shell dropped in Company I., and severely wounded three men.

The brigade was faced about, and marched about ten rods to the rear, or just over the crown of the hill, halted again, faced to the front, stacked arms, and resumed their old attitude of waiting. This ended the hostilities for the day.

About three o'clock fighting commenced away to our right, which continued until after dark. We could see the charging lines and hear the crash of battle, but could not learn whether we were successful or not.

At nightfall four companies, under Capt. Alcott, were ordered to relieve the 13th New York. My Company, C., and Company F. were put out on the picket posts, and the other two were the reserve. In front of us was a meadow, about two acres in width, and beyond that, a cornfield, in which was the enemy's picket line.

My Orderly Sergeant requested me to let him go out to the fence, and see if he could not find out what had been going on away to our right that afternoon. I sent for Lient. Hatch, of Company F., had him take charge of both companies, and joined the Sergeant in his scout. They were so busy picking corn that we got very near to the fence without being discovered, and could plainly hear what was said. They did not know the result of the afternoon's battle, but one said to another, "I wonder why they did not come down here and fight us. We were ready for them."

At midnight we were relieved, and at three in the morning were all withdrawn. We found the brigade ready to march, but they permitted us to stop long enough to absorb some coffee and hard tack before joining them.

Our line of march led us back until we found a road that ran parallel to our late line of battle. We turned into it, and at 9 A. M. reached a hill overlooking the Warrenton Turnpike, passing a house which those who had been in the previous year's battle thought to be the Henry House. We descended the hill, crossed the road at a point near where the stream called Young's Branch crosses it; ascended the opposite slope in a direction diagonal to the road, leaving a large house to our left; halted when near to a large wood, and found ourselves upon our new line of battle.

To make the story of our afternoon's operations intelligible, I must first, as well as I can, describe the ground over which we operated. The forest to our right and front was very extensive, but after passing through that part directly in front of our regiment, a quarter of a mile or less, we came to a "U" shaped opening; the open part of the letter being towards our left flank, which permitted the enemy, whose lines were curved, to note every movement after we emerged from the forest into the opening.

About thirty yards from the border of the forest was a dry watercourse, wide and with perpendicular banks, and about one hundred and fifty yards farther on, was a railroad cut, along the border of the other side of the "U" in which was the enemy's line of battle. Following the line of the railroad to the right, just as it was lost to view in the woods, it curved in towards the valley, and then re-curved in the opposite direction, the line here being an embankment instead of a cut, but forming a very good defence to fight behind. The ground from the watercourse to the cut sloped upward without any irregularity, which could be used as a cover, except at one point within fifty yards of the enemy's position.

To return to our line of battle: An hour or more had elapsed, during which time a battery had been placed in

position on our right, a shell or two had come whistling over us from our right front, and a good many men had come back wounded from the skirmish line.

Our brave Colonel was quite a hand at making little speeches to his officers when an important duty was near, and also in explaining what he intended to do; and we therefore were not surprised when each commander of a company received orders to report to him. He said: "Gentlemen, the enemy is in a railroad cut in front of us, in a strong position, and it is not intended to attack him there, but this regiment is intended to relieve the skirmish line now in front (the 16th Michigan Sharpshooters), make a good fight, and we are to be relieved by the 13th New York. When I am relieved I shall file the head of my line to the left, and I want all the companies to follow in the line of the preceding company, and turn at the same point. In case we draw them out and have a fight, I want you to remember what Michigan and our friends at home expect of us." With that he turned and left us.

The experience of the past three months had been sufficient to teach the officers the difference between a skirmish and an approaching battle. They stood silent for a moment; then Capt. Pomeroy looked intently at Lient. Bloodgood, who was his chum, and remarked, "I say skirmish, Bloody, how are you till after the battle," and reached out his hand; at once the hands of the assembled group began to grasp each other, and "how are you till after the battle," was repeated again and again. They then turned quietly away, and resumed their position in rear of their respective companies.

Before a half hour had passed we were commanded to take arms and advance into the woods. We passed nearly through, when we were halted, and ordered to lie down,

preliminary, as we supposed, to the projected skirmish ; but soon our massed brigade passed over us, halted and deployed into battle line, leaving a space between the 13th New York and the 18th Massachusetts, just large enough for us to fill, which we at once proceeded to do. Gen. Butterfield rode up to the rear of our line, called for our cheers, and gave the command to charge, and we swept out of the forest like an avalanche.

At the dry watercourse we received our first check ; the line tumbled into it, in more or less confusion ; the guns of Longstreet, away on our left, dropped their shells into it with a quickness and precision which gave me a new experience ; and on account of his curved lines the fire from his batteries followed our every movement in this charge, in a way I have never seen equaled before or since.

The bank of the watercourse was so high that the men had to place one hand upon it, in order to lift themselves out ; the line was new formed, and the advance continued ; but hardly had we started when the musketry fire from the railroad cut began to tell upon us. It was so severe that the regiment to our right swerved away to the right, leaving a large gap between us. Our commands to our men were merely, "Steady, men—steady, and touch to the left." The line was doing well, and it seemed as if we would soon be upon the foe, but at fifty yards from the cut it stopped, and here the slaughter commenced.

The enemy in the curved line of the railroad, on our right, was almost on a line with us, and began an oblique fire on our right flank ; the enemy in front and well protected and only fifty yards away and Longstreet's guns were still as active as ever.

Just as we came to a halt Lieut. Hatch, in command of Company F, came to me with a mangled arm and said,

“Captain, will you take care of my company: I am hit,” and went to the rear. The men were standing up and loading and firing with a coolness not to be excelled, but they were so exposed that I ordered them to lie down. Just then a bullet paid its respects to my right thigh. A moment after Capt. Wendell came to me, and said: “The Colonel is killed, and I am in command. There are troops in the woods in the rear of us, and I think they are going to charge. We must hang on here, keep down the enemy’s fire, and go in with them when they reach us.”

I said: “I am wounded, but will hang on as long as I can;” I looked back at the woods and saw a Zouave regiment in line of battle. In doing so, I took a step or two away from the Captain, a shell burst over our heads, so near that I felt the flash on my face. I turned to him, and saw him holding one broken arm in the other hand and going to the rear. Before he had got two rods away a ball from the enemy in the cut pierced and instantly killed him.

The men were falling so fast that several of the officers picked up the muskets which they had dropped and used them. Among the number was Lieut. Arnold, who in his earnestness got back a little too far from cover, and an oblique shot struck him in the forehead, and he, too, instantly died.

Capt. Whittlesey received his death wound at the same time that Col. Roberts did, when the charge was made; and Lieut. Garrison was killed farther to the left of the line, while fighting by the side of Capt. Spencer.

The numbness from my wounded limb passed away, and the pain that followed admonished me that I had better bandage it. While doing so Capt. Alcott, who was then in command, came to me and said: “Captain, to save our colors, and our men, I must order a retreat; the 13th New York are going back and we are doing no good here.” I said, “All

right, I will be with you soon," and, with head bent down, continued to fix my bandage. All at once I heard the Captain say: "Don't fire; we surrender," and looking up I saw a half score of men in gray uniforms, with muskets cocked and leveled at us, who replied, "If you surrender, give up your arms," and looking on beyond them I saw a hundred men or more of the old regiment massed around the colors, moving swiftly, but in good form, nearly to the woods. The sight was so inspiring that I had to cry, "Bully for the old regiment." I suppose that the same thought had come to Capt. Pomeroy that was in the mind of Capt. Alcott, as to the uselessness of keeping up the contest; and he, therefore, ordered a retreat. If so, it was the last order he ever gave, for a shot from the foe then and there ended his earthly career.

The regiment, under the direction of Captains E. W. Belton and Clinton Spencer, and Lieutenants H. C. Christiancy, O. C. Allen, D. C. Bradish, Wm. Byrnes, and John Griffin,—seven officers out of nineteen, who were not incapacitated by wounds, capture, or death, passed a half mile to the rear, halted, and awaited orders.

They were afterward moved back, near to Bull Run; and that night crossed it, and resumed their position in the brigade; and from this time, till the close of the war, this regiment, which stood in line of battle at Gaines Mills, two months before with seven hundred men, seldom carried into action more than two hundred muskets.

In obedience to our new commanders we gave up our arms, but the Sergeant who commanded the party, and who was very friendly, said his Lieutenant had no sash or sword belt; therefore, to cement the new friendship, I gave him mine. Another one of the party attempted to take my watch, but I grasped the hand that grasped the watch, and

forced him to let go. We then—I with my right hand on Capt. Alcott's shoulder, and the Sergeant holding my left arm, moved toward the railroad cut which we had been trying so hard to capture. When about half way, from some cause unknown to me, we were halted; all at once the Captain's form trembled, he looked at me, tried to speak, and sank lifeless to the ground. He had been shot while a prisoner of war.

I had only time to take one look at my noble comrade, when we moved on, and into the cut; and almost as soon as we reached there the watch-seeking scamp again attempted to extract it from my pocket. I resisted, and called for an officer, and a young lieutenant responded. I asked him if he allowed his prisoners to be robbed. He indignantly said he did not: said they were civilized, and asked me to show him the man. I showed him the rascal, who was making his way to the left as fast as he could go, and I never saw him afterward.

A dozen more prisoners were soon assembled, and two dozen guards started to take them to the rear, my new found friend still holding tightly to my arm, but before we had proceeded far some officers met us, and they, thinking that one armed rebel ought to be equal to an unarmed "Yank," reduced our escort one-half, and returned them to the battle line.

As we proceeded we came to a woods road, down which an officer was riding rapidly toward their left. The escort halted and cheered him, and the Sergeant asked me if I knew him. I said I had not yet made his acquaintance, but hoped I should sometime. He said, "That is Stonewall Jackson. What do you think of him?" To not offend, I said he was having it all his own way that afternoon, which seemed to please the Sergeant.

We soon arrived upon the banks of a stream, which I think was Catharpin Creek, were turned over to the guard there, and my new found friend left me. This spot, in which I was to pass five miserable days, was on a steep hillside, covered with stone, with no shade trees or grass, or any other redeeming feature near, except a nice spring of water. I found about a dozen officers surrounded by a guard, and soon another detachment came in, and among them were Lieut. G. C. Mogk, Lieut. John Stepper and Lieut. Wilkins Bloodgood, of my regiment. Lieut. Bloodgood was so badly wounded that he died at Washington about twenty days afterward.

We soon pre-empted a spot on which to spread our blankets, and then took a survey of our surroundings. Prisoners were constantly coming in, and soon there were nearly forty officers in our small corral, and at the foot of the hill, in the woods on our right, a thousand or fifteen hundred men. The battle still continued, but the noise seemed to be getting further away, and the continual bringing in of prisoners was sufficient evidence that the victory was not ours. There was a major of a New York regiment in our corral, so badly injured that he died during the night, and many others so badly off that a Surgeon was asked for, the reply being, always, that they could not take care of their own wounded. The next morning Lieutenants Mogk and Stepper started for Libby, and the second morning afterwards Lieut. Bloodgood and I were paroled.

One of the officers who took our parole said: "You belonged to the 5th Corps, did you? Were you having a dress parade on the hill the forenoon of the 29th of August? Why did you not come down and fight us; we were waiting for you?" In these later times, when thinking over these words and the similar talk heard by the Sergeant and

myself at the edge of the cornfield, and also because no large force took up a position in front of us during the day, I am constrained to believe that when Morrell's Division took their position a large portion of Longstreet's force was in front of us, and that in order to get on Jackson's right flank we would have had to first overcome Longstreet. Of course, the position I have taken in this matter does not oblige anyone else to stand beside me unless he wishes to.

How we existed the five days we were waiting at this place, for our Medical Corps to reach and take care of us, I do not now recall, except that we were very hungry, and at night very cold; but on the sixth day we reached our field hospital, were given plenty of good coffee and soft bread, and a piece of loaf sugar to eat with it, in lieu of butter, and the next day were sent to Washington. I once thought the ambulances and stretcher bearers should have reached us sooner, but the seventh day after the battle, forty-five ambulances and carriages, in one train, took their way to Washington—a sufficient proof that there was a great deal for the Medical Corps to take care of.

While in the hands of the enemy, we were several times called upon by their officers, who were eager to discuss the merits of the war; a controversy I thought best to avoid; but the fourth of September a group of them came about us, and one of them said, looking intently at me: "Captain, you are all right;" and, on my asking him what he meant, he replied: "You have a wound there that will show your friends at home that you are of the kind that can give and take blows in battle, and before it is well peace will be declared, and you will never see another battle-field. I did not respond to his remark until he urged me, when I said: "I do not agree with you, and I do not care to get up any feeling between us." He said: "Speak freely, do you

suppose I would take advantage of a wounded prisoner? I want to know just what you think." I then said: "The North did not want war, but, now they are in it, I predict they will never cry quits until you are back in the Union, as you used to be. He replied: "You are crazy; this morning Lee's advance is in Maryland; Washington and Baltimore are at our mercy; one more victory for us, and France and England will intervene; you will have to stop the war, and we will have obtained our separation from you."

I quote this conversation, because it goes to show that their hopes of success were based a great deal on foreign intervention, and a few successful battle-fields; but every battle was not a victory for them, and intervention failed to connect; and if my confident foe lived until Appomattox told the story, he probably concluded that I was the true prophet.

This paper has grown to a greater length than I intended: but I cannot conclude it without saying a few words about the comrades whose deaths were so noble and so untimely.

Col. Roberts, Capt. Wendell, Lieut. Bloodgood, Lieut. Arnold and Lieut. Garrison received their primary teaching in the Art of War in that organization in this city which sent out so many noble men who took their advance degrees in the great seminaries of well fought battle-fields: I mean the Detroit Light Guard. All honor to it, and the other volunteer military organizations that are upheld by the patriotism of the young men of their time, men who believe that behind civil authority and civil laws there must be some power to help enforce them.

Col. Roberts' first service, however, was in the Mexican war, and when President Lincoln called for volunteers he was one of the first to respond. He accepted a commission in the three months' service, and before the regiment was disbanded he had commenced organizing the new regiment.

Capt. Charles E. Wendell, Capt. Edward Pomeroy, Lieut. Irving Garrison, Lieut. Henry C. Arnold and Lieut. Wilkins Bloodgood all carried muskets in the first Bull Run battle.

Capt. R. H. Alcott served in the Mexican war and on the Peninsula, and was a man of great courage and patriotism. Capt. Whittlessey also served on the Peninsula, and was a brave and skillful officer.

The names of the men who died on that ill-fated field I cannot mention ; but the fact that fifty-five officers and men, out of three hundred and twenty, perished in a twenty minutes' contest conclusively proves that they were well disciplined and brave, and the undaunted way in which they rallied around the colors and marched off from the battle line has been a pleasant memory to me for many years.

One year after this battle it was my fortune to again pass over the field, and my heart was saddened at beholding the exposed remains of my poorly buried comrades, lying where they fell.

They had been so slightly interred that the storms of winter had exposed them to view, and we were so situated that we had to pass on and leave them as they were : but since then they have been gathered up and placed in that grand Mausoleum at Arlington that contains so many of the brave unknown that perished on Virginia battle-fields, and of the thousands that there repose there are none more deserving of a nation's kind remembrance than are these men who fought and fell at Groveton; and while I do not wish to unduly extol the merits of the regiment to which they belonged, I, with its other survivors, do ask that it may be classed as the peer of the other noble war organizations that went out from this State.

This is honor enough for us ; it should be honor enough for anyone.

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